United Nations S/PV.5736

Security Council

Sixty-second year

Provisional

5736th meeting

Wednesday, 29 August 2007, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Gayama	(Congo)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	France	Mr. Lacroix
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Indonesia	Mrs. Adiwoso Asmady
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Peru	Mr. Chávez
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Qahtani
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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07-49245 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, the Syrian Arab Republic, Viet Nam and Yemen in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 24 August 2007 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2007/514, and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Wednesday, 29 August 2007, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Michael Williams, Special Coordinator for the Peace Process in the Middle East and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Williams to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Michael Williams. As this is the last appearance of Mr. Williams in his capacity as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, I wish, on behalf of the members, to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Williams for his contributions to the work of the Council at this time of change on the ground and important developments in the Middle East peace process. The knowledge and insight shared by Mr. Williams have been much appreciated by the Council members, who wish him well in his new assignment. I now give the floor to Mr. Williams.

Mr. Williams: I have just completed my last visit to the region as Special Coordinator, and I return guardedly optimistic but conscious of many challenges ahead. The substantive dialogue developing between Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) chairman Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and the reform efforts of Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad have created growing expectations. The anticipated engagement of Tony Blair, the Quartet's representative, more active regional diplomacy and the preparations for a series of high-profile international gatherings — above all the November meeting called for by President Bush — reinforce those efforts. In the period ahead, the diplomatic process will need to be carefully monitored and supported and must be buttressed by urgent and meaningful efforts and steps on the ground,

if the many factors that could derail efforts are to be overcome.

I wish to turn first to the bilateral process between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, who met again yesterday for three hours. That meeting followed closely on their meeting on 6 August at Jericho, which marked the first visit by an Israeli leader to a Palestinian town in seven years. These meetings will continue, with the next one anticipated to be held on 10 September, before a mission to the region by United States Secretary of State Rice. Both sides have reported to me substantive discussions and exchanges of ideas on permanent status issues, as well as on confidence-building steps. There also appears to be a welcome common desire to reach an agreement or understanding that could be presented to the international meeting in November.

Inevitably, differences of emphasis are noticeable regarding the precise content and scope of what needs to be achieved. For expectations to be met, I believe that the talks will need to shift gear to achieve concrete agreements on permanent status issues and implementation steps. Given the sensitivity of those issues, the shortness of time and the amount of work to be done, that will not be easy. But, with political will and supporting action on the ground, it is my assessment that that can be achieved.

Turning to the situation in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority, under Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, has begun to implement reforms and a serious security programme. The Palestinian Authority Government has initiated measures to remove redundant employees and end superfluous hiring at ministries. It is preparing an emergency plan for immediate public expenditures, while initiating wide-ranging consultations for the production of a medium-term expenditure framework for the period 2008-2010.

On security, Israel's agreement not to pursue a number of wanted militants provided — they turn in their weapons and report to Palestinian Authority offices — has provided an important first example of security cooperation. I would also like to commend the work of the Palestinian Authority security forces in Jenin, who recently rescued a soldier of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from a mob after he had mistakenly entered the city.

It is incumbent upon both parties to respect the agreements that have been reached and to move to further cooperation that results in an early end to Israeli incursions and the deployment of credible Palestinian Authority security personnel on the streets of cities such as Nablus. Further releases of prisoners would also build upon the important and positive first step already taken by Prime Minister Olmert in that regard.

The easing of closures is another urgent requirement. While Israel has its legitimate concerns, the 532 obstacles in the West Bank continue to restrict the movement of Palestinians and to prevent normal economic activity. Freedom of movement is essential in any economy. In the context of genuine security cooperation and political empowerment, it is vital for Israel to ease closures in the West Bank. I am also concerned about reports by United Nations agencies about increasing difficulties for staff access.

Let me turn now to Gaza. I remain deeply concerned about the political, institutional and socio-economic consequences of the continued split between Gaza and the West Bank. President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad confirmed to me that they remained committed to reintegrating Gaza under the legitimate authority of the Palestinian Authority. I welcome that clear position. For its part, Hamas continues to call for dialogue. However, in the absence of steps that indicate acceptance by Hamas of President Abbas's dismissal of Mr. Haniya as Prime Minister on 15 June, or its readiness to reverse its actions, progress will remain elusive.

While some order has been brought to the streets of Gaza, the actions of Hamas are taking place outside the framework of the rule of law and the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, generating concern regarding respect for human rights and the future development of Gaza. Hamas is recruiting volunteers and using charities in efforts to provide certain services, since the majority of Palestinian Authority employees are not reporting to work owing to the dispute over whom they should report to.

Hamas continues to assert its military control over the Gaza Strip, including through the establishment of new security body, a coastal force, a female police force and an interior security force. There are reports of increasing arrests and clashes with other political factions. Palestinian civil society groups have documented allegations of the harassment of

journalists, arbitrary arrests and torture and other human rights abuses by Hamas militants.

The Palestinian Authority is continuing to pay public sector salaries in Gaza. Due to efforts by the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the United Nations, food and medical supplies are entering through two border crossings, namely, Sufa and Karem Shalom, as well as through a conveyor belt at the Karni crossing. Yesterday, for the first time in two months, potatoes were exported through Karem Shalom. Despite a temporary interruption of support earlier this month, owing to concerns about a diversion of resources, the European Commission has resumed payments to enable fuel shipments to Gaza for local electricity generation.

However, those measures are not enough to prevent a worrying social and economic deterioration in Gaza. The shortage of some essential commodities, unstable prices, the accumulation of garbage owing to municipal strikes and, above all, the mass closure of industry are sources of acute concern. The main commercial crossing of Karni has now been closed for more that two months, ever since the Hamas takeover led to the removal of trained Palestinian Authority security personnel on the Palestinian side. Neither the import of raw materials nor the export of commercial goods through Karni has been possible. As a result, 85 per cent of manufacturing businesses have been closed and 95 per cent of private construction projects have been halted — at a loss of $160 million, as well as $213 million in United Nations projects. Approximately 70,000 workers have lost their jobs.

The United Nations and others continue efforts to find a formula that could lead to the early reopening of Karni. United Nations policy in that regard is guided by three concerns: first, that the people of Gaza should not be subject to collective punishment; secondly, that further damage to the socio-economic fabric of Gaza will only increase dependency on aid and fuel extremism; and, thirdly, that all steps taken should be consistent with the goal of reunifying the occupied Palestinian territory under the Palestinian Authority. I call for the cooperation of all parties to work to reopen the Karni crossing.

Israeli-Palestinian violence has continued this month, claiming the lives of 51 Palestinians, injuring 145 others and injuring 13 Israelis. A further 18 Palestinians were killed and 88 injured in internal violence. I would like to draw the Council's attention to three aspects of that violence.

First, 83 rockets and 89 mortars were fired by Palestinian militants, including Hamas, from Gaza into Israel. A school and a day care centre in Sederot were hit, and an infant was among those injured. There have also been several attacks with those weapons on the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip. I condemn those attacks on civilians and on crossing points used by civilians as well as aid workers seeking to help the people of Gaza. Reports of the continued smuggling of weapons and materiel into the Gaza strip from Egypt are another cause for concern. On 25 August, two Palestinian militants scaled the wall between Israel and Gaza and opened fire on IDF positions before being killed by IDF fire.

Secondly, Palestinian casualties of IDF operations in the West Bank and Gaza include, in the latest period, five children killed and 23 injured. A Palestinian woman also died of a heart attack while waiting at a West Bank checkpoint to be taken to a hospital. I remind Israel of its obligations to protect civilians under international humanitarian law and of the need for more credible accountability measures, as called for by the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Thirdly, I wish to underscore my concern at the lawless action of some Israeli settlers, who injured eight Palestinians, including a United Nations staff member, in violent incidents in the past month. In Hebron, there have been confrontations between Jewish settlers and Israeli security personnel. Eighteen Israeli security personnel and 12 settlers were injured during the evacuation of a building in the market of the Old City after settlers had refused to obey the orders of the Israeli Government. Three settlers were also injured by Palestinians throwing rocks. I note also the continued lack of progress in securing the release of the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and I call on all parties to work with Egypt as it seeks to resolve that issue and the fate of a number of Palestinian prisoners.

I am also deeply concerned that Israeli settlement activity continues throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. I regret to say that there are no credible efforts or actions to remove any of the more than 100 outposts or halt settlement expansion. Israeli steps to meet its Road Map obligations in this regard are crucial to the credibility of the renewed diplomatic process.

Settlement activity undermines hope for a contiguous Palestinian State. Settlements and their supporting infrastructure are also a key cause of significant hardship for the Palestinian people, as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs details in a forthcoming report.

I have described the bilateral process and the considerable challenges on the ground. I wish to turn now to regional and international diplomatic efforts.

In the aftermath of the visit to Israel in late July of the Foreign Ministers of Egypt and Jordan, as envoys of the committee of the League of Arab States on the Arab Peace Initiative, Arab Foreign Ministers met in Cairo on 30 July and called for the November international meeting to be comprehensive in nature. The Secretary-General recently exchanged views with the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal, on these matters. The Secretary-General believes that the widest possible attendance from the Arab world at the international meeting should be encouraged, and he will be working towards that end.

I note too, in this context, the continued Syrian commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative. I also welcome assurances from both the Israeli and the Syrian leaderships that they have no desire to initiate conflict, despite reports of military exercises and build-ups on both sides, and media speculation about heightened tensions.

The Secretary-General will host his Quartet partners for a meeting here at United Nations Headquarters on 23 September, after which he and other Quartet members will host an *iftar* dinner for members of the Arab League's follow-up committee on the Arab Peace Initiative. This will be an important moment to take stock of the bilateral efforts under way and to make preparations for the November international meeting.

On the following day, 24 September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee will meet at the ministerial level here at the United Nations. We hope that that meeting will reconfirm the international community's strong support for the Palestinian Authority Government's programme. The meeting will also be a key stepping stone towards a donor pledging conference planned for December.

The Quartet representative, Tony Blair, will participate in both the Quartet and Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meetings, which will be an opportunity to share with international partners his agenda for the period ahead to support Palestinian reform and economic rejuvenation. Mr. Blair's core team and office are being established in Jerusalem, and he is expected to arrive there on 4 September for his second visit. Several United Nations offices and departments are collaborating to finalize arrangements for the provision of financial management and security support for Mr. Blair's mission.

In Lebanon, the political deadlock that has gripped the country since November of last year continues. International initiatives to facilitate a Lebanese dialogue and to address the causes behind the stalemate also continue, but there has been little tangible shift in the positions of the parties. In this respect, I pay tribute to the recent efforts of France in particular.

Attention is now turning towards presidential elections. The Speaker of Parliament has begun constitutional consultations, signalling the advent of the official process through which the Lebanese will select their next president. The Secretary-General hopes that the Lebanese will find their way to consensus on this critical issue. He supports the clear desire of the Lebanese to hold presidential elections as stipulated in their Constitution — an outcome that would help to achieve a breakthrough in the country's political impasse.

We also note that on 5 August, parliamentary by-elections were held in a tense but orderly atmosphere for the seats rendered vacant by the tragic assassinations of Pierre Gemayel and Walid Eido.

In northern Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces have entered their fifteenth week of confrontation with fighters from Fatah al-Islam in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared. According to official figures, 141 soldiers have been killed and hundreds wounded since fighting erupted in May. The exact extent of civilian casualties has not been established. Fatah al-Islam fighters have continued to reject calls by the army to surrender. Last week, the army ensured the evacuation of the remaining family members of Fatah al-Islam fighters.

The United Nations has worked closely with the Lebanese authorities in fashioning a strategy to support

the Government's post-conflict reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared camp and its assistance to the approximately 30,000 Palestinian refugees who have been displaced by the fighting. Responsive and concerted action on the part of the Lebanese authorities and donors will continue to be required in order to deliver effective assistance.

In the south, the situation has remained generally calm. There has been a modest decrease in the number of Israeli air violations of the Blue Line, with 170 overflights recorded since my last briefing to the Council. However, the fact that the overflights continue represents a continuing violation.

Despite a welcome reduction in the number of mine and unexploded-ordnance incidents in recent months, tragedies continue. On 23 August, a non-governmental organization worker was killed while clearing a cluster-bomb site. Four civilian deminers were injured in that incident, and one supervisor was injured in another. To date, 22 Lebanese civilians have been killed as a result of the unexploded ordnance contaminating large tracts of southern Lebanon.

While the United Nations continues its demining efforts on the ground, the provision of the necessary cluster-munitions strike data would greatly facilitate the rate of clearance operations and reduce the present threat to civilians. Further to the adoption of resolution 1773 (2007) last week, the Secretary-General reiterates his call for Israel to provide that strike data.

Let me conclude by saying that we cannot afford a new failure in the efforts to revive the Arab-Israeli peace process. There is a hope now which has been absent for almost seven years. A setback at this stage could have serious consequences. Nor can we allow progress in Lebanon in the past year to be stalled by internal political deadlock or by opponents of Lebanese sovereignty and unity. In both arenas, the international community's engagement must be robust and purposeful in order to advance the implementation of the resolutions of this Council.

I will miss the opportunity to contribute to those goals as United Nations Special Coordinator and as Special Adviser on the Middle East, a role I have undertaken since last summer's war in Lebanon. I wish to thank the Secretary-General and his predecessor for giving me this opportunity, and to pay tribute to the professionalism and dedication of my colleagues in the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and here in New York. I wish them well and look forward to working closely with the United Nations in the region in my new role.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Williams for his briefing. In accordance with the understanding reached among Council Members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): Let me begin by joining you in commending the outstanding work of Michael Williams. He has exemplified the finest traditions of an international civil servant, working on behalf of the Secretariat and through it on behalf of the international community, demonstrating again, as he did today, thoroughness and professionalism in the way he has dealt with this very complex issue in offering us balanced and constructive advice that actually helps facilitate our responsibility in ensuring the promotion of peace and security. We will miss him and we wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

On 16 July, President Bush called for an international meeting this autumn of nations that support a two-State solution, reject violence, recognize Israel's right to exist and commit to all previous agreements among the parties. This meeting on a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will aim to support discussions and negotiations between the parties and achieve meaningful progress on the path to peace, Palestinian statehood and an end to the conflict. We believe the Government of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad can be a partner for peace. The international community has recognized that and is responding by re-establishing diplomatic and economic ties with the Palestinian Authority Government. As President Bush has said, the international community must work with the Palestinian Authority to develop a solid institutional and economic foundation for a future Palestinian State.

In that vein, Secretary Rice and Palestinian Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad signed an $80 million assistance package aimed at supporting efforts to reform and professionalize the Palestinian security forces. The framework agreement formalizes the

intention of the United States to provide assistance to the Palestinian Authority to promote law and order by strengthening and reforming the Palestinian security sector. We believe the ability to provide security for the population is a core responsibility of any functioning government. The rule of law and security must be the foundation of any successful Palestinian Government.

We believe that the assistance package will help improve the Palestinian Authority's capacity to deliver security for the Palestinian people and to fight terrorism, to build confidence between the parties and will ultimately help to meet the security needs of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

The United States and the Palestinian Authority have worked together closely to design the programme and will continue to cooperate in its implementation. The security assistance package is in addition to more than $190 million in United States assistance to the Abbas-Fayyad Government this year. We encourage others, particularly regional parties to step forward with additional support at this critical time.

We continue to call on all Palestinians to reject terror and on the Palestinian Authority Government to arrest terrorists, confiscate illegal weapons and confront corruption. We remain deeply concerned by the continued intransigence and illegal occupation of Gaza by Hamas, including recent moves to crack down on freedom of speech there.

We are very concerned about Hamas' provision of safe haven to fellow terrorist organizations operating in Gaza and strongly condemn the continuing acts of terror, such as recurring indiscriminate rocket attacks being conducted from Gaza against civilians in Israel.

We welcome the 6 August and 28 August meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, the second and third such meetings since late June. We strongly support direct dialogue between the parties. The United States remains committed to working with Israel and the Palestinians on day-to-day issues that affect the lives of Israelis and Palestinians, as well as a political horizon for Palestinian statehood. We have always said that bilateral dialogue between the parties is the key to realizing the two-State vision. We will continue to work with the parties and the international community to that end.

The development of a viable Palestinian economy and institutions remains crucial to the success and prosperity of a future Palestinian State. The United States looks forward to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in New York next month and to the Quartet meeting, where we expect to hear about Quartet Representative Tony Blair's travel to the region and his recommendations on the economic and institutional agenda. We look forward to continued coordination and cooperation with the Palestinians, the international community and Quartet Representative Tony Blair to lay the foundation for President Bush's vision of two States, Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

On the situation in Lebanon, let me briefly note that we welcome the unanimous decision of the Security Council to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for one year. We remain committed to a sovereign, democratic and prosperous Lebanon and continue to call for the full implementation of all Council resolutions pertaining to Lebanon, including resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). While we commend the work of UNIFIL in South Lebanon, we remain deeply concerned by persistent reports of breaches of the arms embargo along the Syria-Lebanon border and call on all States, particularly Syria and Iran, to abide by their commitments under resolution 1701 (2006).

We also decry the continuing failure of militias to disarm. Those issues, along with the fate of the two abducted Israeli soldiers, must be addressed if efforts to achieve peace are to succeed.

We applaud the peaceful and transparent parliamentary by-elections in Lebanon this month and congratulate the winners and the Lebanese people on the process. We look forward to similarly free and fair and peaceful presidential elections this fall that are held in accordance with Lebanon's constitution and are free of foreign intervention.

Mrs. Asmady (Indonesia): Allow me to begin by extending my delegation's appreciation to Mr. Williams for his comprehensive briefing on the issue before us. Indonesia regards the situation in the Middle East as one of the most important unresolved issues of peace and security in the world today.

Conflicts in human history have their beginnings and their ends. The war that led to the birth of the Westphalian system of States concluded in thirty years. The First World War ended in four years and the

Second World War in six years. Most conflicts in other regions, such as in the Balkans, Africa, Asia and Latin America, also have their endings.

Conflict in the Middle East, however, has continued since the second half of the 1940s without clear signs of its final conclusion. Developments on the ground have made the conflict one of the most volatile and protracted ever. The Middle East conflict will remain unresolved, if all parties concerned do not go beyond the ordinary in their efforts to find a viable solution to the conflict. There is no better time than now to act to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and broker a peace.

The current surge in diplomacy at different levels to jump-start the peace process is a welcome development. A series of Quartet meetings has paved the way for a more substantial role. In our view, all parties concerned need to engage in a meaningful and inclusive political process that will bring forth a consensus by the parties.

The resumption of bilateral meetings between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert on 6 August is also encouraging. My delegation, however, believes that the meeting will be meaningful only if Israel has genuine commitment to the discussion and commitment to the four core issues, namely, the fate of the Palestinian refugees who fled or were forced to flee their homes; the status of Jerusalem; the borders of a Palestinian State and the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

The active role of the Arab League can be very useful in many ways, including by providing legitimacy and regional perspective to the effort. We have observed such success in establishing legitimacy in other regions. Regional arrangements can serve as a strong complement to the activities of the United Nations itself and should be encouraged.

The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative that the League advocates is a homegrown peace process that deserves our support. This initiative has the benefit of representing a common Arab position and a commitment to cooperating for peace and stability in the region. We encourage the establishment of a special committee composed of concerned Member States and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, as suggested in the Arab Peace Initiative document. We support the initiative's efforts to gain cooperation from the Security Council, as well as from the Quartet, and from other interested parties.

Peace in Palestine remains far from reality. Sustainable peace in the country can be achieved only when Palestinians are united. Internal division and splintering threatens to undermine the concept of one sovereign and independent Palestine and to weaken concerted efforts to achieve that idea. We therefore believe that a dialogue between Hamas and Fatah is critical to moving forward and should be assigned paramount importance.

Support and assistance provided for Palestine by the international community should not broaden the political and de facto division among Palestinians, but should rather promote unity among them. Any efforts to assist one faction at the expense of other factions will only create more difficulties for the Palestinians and to the idea of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State.

My delegation shares the view that holds that the people of Gaza should not be punished for the Hamas takeover. Palestinians in Gaza are part of one Palestinian nation aspiring to the creation of one democratic and peaceful State. We also believe that the engagements by the international community for Palestine must be based not simply on the humanitarian costs, but also on the principles that promote peace and unity.

The end of the conflict between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza is heartening. Yet, Indonesia remains deeply concerned over the growing humanitarian situation in Gaza. The region has increasingly become economically and politically isolated and Israel's blockade has brought trade to an abrupt halt. As it has been reported that more than 90 per cent of Gaza's factories have been closed and 70,000 people have lost their jobs because shipments of raw materials have not been getting in.

These are ingredients which, in our view, could devolve into violence and conflict and we should not let this situation continue to deteriorate. The inhabitants depend on the continued support of the United Nations and we should continue to provide it while at the same time working with the parties to the conflict to find a more satisfactory political solution as soon as possible.

The burden that Palestinians are bearing now has been made heavier by the continuing incursions by the Israeli occupying forces into Palestinian towns and neighbourhoods across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Indonesia strongly deplores those inhumane and illegal actions which constitute a grave breach of international humanitarian and human rights laws.

Regarding Lebanon, unity is a key aspect of the achievement of sustainable peace in the country. Accordingly, Indonesia fully supports the initiative of France in hosting a Lebanese dialogue and its follow-up. We encourage the Government of Lebanon and all parties concerned in the country to redouble their efforts in promoting political dialogue and national reconciliation. In our view, a blend of sincerity on the part of the international community to help Lebanon and a strong commitment by all factions in the country to inclusive political dialogue and rational reconciliation are essential to the achievement of peace, stability, and unity in the country.

Israel's invasion into Lebanon a year ago had brought about not only physical damages and civilian casualties among Lebanese, but also a menace to the security and stability in the southern part of Lebanon and beyond. The Security Council has been decisive in responding to this incursion by strengthening the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)and expanding its mandate, through the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006). My delegation observes that after one year of its deployment, UNIFIL has not only provided the Lebanese with the opportunity to rebuild and restore their daily life, but has also helped to establish a new strategic military and security environment in southern Lebanon.

UNIFIL is the vanguard of resolution 1701 (2006). We believe that only UNIFIL has the authority to monitor on the ground compliance by all parties concerned with resolution 1701 (2006). We also believe that UNIFIL must have the capacity to deter and respond to challenges that could undermine resolution 1701 (2006), including the daily violations of Lebanese airspace by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which blatantly contravene the spirit and letter of resolution 1701 (2006). We remain deeply concerned over the continued presence of unexploded ordnance in southern Lebanon used by Israel in last summer's war. In this regard, Indonesia would like to join the call of the Secretary-General to urge the Government of Israel to provide the strike data of the unexploded ordnance to the United Nations as soon as possible. The permanent ceasefire as envisaged by resolution 1701 (2006) is still far off. The role of UNIFIL in monitoring the cessation of hostilities and in achieving a permanent ceasefire remains critical.

The Middle East conflict has been very prolonged. The need to find a peaceful, just, lasting, and comprehensive settlement to the conflict is dire. The Government of Indonesia is committed to helping achieve an end to this protracted and bitter conflict that has been a source of suffering for the parties for far too long.

We hope that multilateral efforts, including the Security Council and those of the Quartet and the Arab League, could maximize their potential in contributing to the achievement of a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the relevant resolutions of the Council, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of Land for Peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Al-Qahtani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you for convening the monthly briefing this morning to discuss the item on the situation in the Middle East, and to thank Mr. Michael Williams, Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing to the Council. We wish him Godspeed in his endeavours.

The question of the Middle East remains one of the oldest and most important issues with which the Council has been dealing, on a constant and regular basis. However, the poor progress made so far in the peace process has been an inherent component of this question. Violence, on the other hand, continues unabated and unhappy news flows constantly from that region.

Last month, Israel, the occupying Power, continued its illegal and inhuman practice in the occupied Gaza Strip and West Bank, killing many civilians and defenceless children, in flagrant violation of international law. That specifically constitutes a clear and unambiguous violation of the relevant provisions of the Geneva Conventions. The right of Israel to defend its citizens does not warrant resorting to such excessive, illegal and inhumane practices. In fact, such practices could only undermine the chances of continuing the peace process and could contribute to

increasing tensions in the Arab and Muslim worlds, thus creating an environment conducive to the spread of violence.

For several months now, the Israeli Government has been violating the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem and allowing excavations and demolition along the western wall of the compound. Despite the flimsy justifications given by the Israeli Government for undertaking such excavations, those excavations are considered part of a pattern of actions by Israel aimed at changing the legal status, demographic composition and religious and historical landmarks of the occupied city of Jerusalem. Those measures and actions are illegal and void, as repeatedly stressed by the Security Council and the General Assembly and as clearly stated in resolution 465 (1980).

The latest disagreements between the brethren in Palestine are unfortunate. We are confident that this state of affairs will not continue. Having said that, we stress that achieving Palestinian national accord is in everybody's interest. On the other hand, it is unacceptable that Israel exploits events in Gaza as a pretext to impose an unjust siege and an economic embargo on the Gaza Strip that adversely affect all its innocent population. Gaza has become a big prison where the civilian population is suffering from a shortage of basic needs and significant restrictions on movement. That environment causes further deterioration in the already poor humanitarian conditions of the civilian population. The Gaza Strip is on the verge of economic collapse and has become entirely dependent on international aid, as recently noted by the United Nations Secretary-General.

In those tragic circumstances, the need to accelerate efforts to reach a comprehensive and lasting peaceful settlement of this crisis could not be felt more deeply. The international community, particularly the Quartet, should take action aiming first and foremost to establish stability and Palestinian national unity among the various factions. It should refrain from any action that could lead to the exacerbation of differences between brethren, in view of the negative impact that internal differences have on peace and security in that region.

In the light of the deadlock in the peace process — despite some limited progress, such as the recent meeting between the Palestinian President and the Israeli Prime Minister — the involvement of international actors is indispensable to move the peace process forward. Therefore, we believe that the intention expressed by the Quartet to meet next September as part of its efforts to provide diplomatic support for the talks is a positive and useful development. In that regard, we hope that the appointment of Mr. Blair as the Quartet's new envoy will constitute a step towards the revitalization of the group's role, and we wish him success in his work.

We also hope that the United States initiative to hold a peace conference for the Middle East next fall will yield concrete results and will not have a fate similar to that of previous initiatives. To achieve success in that endeavour, all parties need to strive for peace in a genuine spirit. They also need to acknowledge that violence cannot be a solution in the Middle East. The solution must in fact be based on the establishment of two States, in accordance with the international terms of reference, relevant Security Council resolutions and the Quartet road map.

With regard to the Lebanese issue, we share with all parties the concern that the political situation in the country has so far been marred by instability. One year after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) the situation on the borders remains calm, but Israel must cease its continuous violation of the Lebanese airspace and cooperate in the implementation of the resolution, as well as other Council resolutions relevant to Lebanon, as a prerequisite for long-term stability. All Lebanese need to unite in the face of threats to the stability, security and national unity of Lebanon. All Lebanese political forces need to return to the table of dialogue and place national interest above all other considerations.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank Mr. Williams for his comprehensive and detailed briefing. I wish to thank him for his past efforts and also wish him well in his new endeavours.

Over the last month, the situation in the Middle East has witnessed encouraging developments. We have noted that a group of Palestinian prisoners has been released and Israel has returned some tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority. These are positive steps that should be acknowledged.

We welcome in particular the two meetings held earlier this month between Chairman Abbas and Prime

Minister Olmert, including the one concluded only yesterday in Jerusalem. We appreciate the two leaders' will to maintain the momentum of the meetings and we look forward to efforts by both sides to reach understanding, mutual trust and cooperation, and to lay a necessary and solid foundation for the revival of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

Notwithstanding these developments, the Middle East situation remains a source of concern. Hostilities between the Palestinian and Israeli sides and civilian casualties continue. There is no guarantee of freedom of movement for Palestinians in their own land. The humanitarian situation is rapidly deteriorating. The supply of electricity and food and the sanitation situation are worrisome.

We appeal to the international community to continue to provide assistance to the Palestinian people. At the same time, we urge all parties concerned to observe international humanitarian law and take all necessary measures, including the opening of border crossings, to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

At the same time, we hope that all political parties in Palestine will fulfil the expectations of their people and the international community, put the overall situation and their long-term interests above everything else and strengthen their unity and cooperation for a joint future.

China has always believed that the establishment of an independent Palestinian State that lives in peace, side by side with Israel, on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace is the only way to solve the Palestinian-Israeli dispute in a comprehensive, sustainable and fair manner. Chairman Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert are taking a very important first step in that direction.

If history is any guide, the achievement of peace in the Middle East calls for arduous efforts by all sides and will be a long process. China believes that the international community should shoulder the responsibilities expected of it and create a favourable environment and provide necessary support for the resumption of talks between Palestine and Israel.

We welcome the upcoming high-level meeting of the Quartet next month in New York. We expect the Quartet to come up with new initiatives to push for a resumption of the talks between the two sides. At the same time, the Security Council should play an active role in the Middle East question. We hope that the United Nations, the Quartet, the countries in the region and the Arab League will strengthen their contacts and coordinate their efforts in a joint bid to advance the Middle East peace process. The question of Lebanon and Israel is a major part of the question of the Middle East peace process. Comprehensive peace in the Middle East will not be possible without an appropriate solution of the dispute between Lebanon and Israel. China again appeals for a comprehensive implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and an early achievement of a permanent ceasefire and a sustainable solution to the dispute.

China is also closely following developments in the Lebanese situation. We hope that the Lebanese people will stay united, solve their internal differences in a peaceful manner and maintain the unity, independence and territorial integrity of their country.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): I wish to express my delegation's appreciation to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Michael Williams, for his useful briefing, and I commend his efforts, including his visit to the Middle East last week aimed at reinvigorating the peace process.

My delegation welcomes the meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas in Jerusalem on Tuesday, 28 August, which we hope will contribute to the restoration of trust and the establishment of an atmosphere conducive to moving the peace process towards the ultimate goal of a two-State solution.

Ghana also welcomes the renewed engagement and the recent activities of the Middle East Quartet, including arrangements by the Secretary-General to open an office in Jerusalem for Quartet Representative Tony Blair, who is mandated to help galvanize international support and resources for rebuilding Palestinian institutions of governance, promote the rule of law and help rehabilitate the economy in the occupied territories.

It is our expectation that the Quartet Representative can count on the goodwill and full support of all factions in Palestine and the parties in the region, whose cooperation will be instrumental in ensuring the success of his endeavours in the coming months.

The recently relaunched Arab Peace Initiative, including the resumption of consultations between Israel and its Arab neighbours, are steps in the right direction. We call on all the regional States to continue to play positive and constructive roles to facilitate the search for peace in the Middle East.

My delegation is concerned about the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, especially the worsening socio-economic conditions in Gaza, and calls for the speedy implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access in order to alleviate the plight of innocent civilians, including women and children.

In Lebanon, Ghana commends the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for its sacrifices and welcomes the adoption of resolution 1773 (2007) extending the mandate of UNIFIL, which, together with the Lebanese Armed Forces, has helped to create what has been aptly described as a new strategic environment in Southern Lebanon. We urge the parties to remain committed to the tripartite mechanisms in order to address outstanding issues. As a troop-contributing country, Ghana also welcomes the mitigation measures being taken by the Secretary-General to ensure the safety of UNIFIL personnel.

The troubling situation in Northern Lebanon, where the siege at the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared has lasted for more than three months with no end in sight, gives cause for serious concern. We call on the Fatah al-Islam militias to recognize the sovereignty of the Lebanese Government and give up their arms in the interest of peace.

We are equally concerned about the lack of progress in the inter-Lebanese national dialogue and reconciliation, and call on the various political parties to endeavour to reconvene parliament in order to make the necessary preparations for the holding of presidential elections, as President Emile Lahoud's term approaches its end.

We are pleased with reports of progress that has been made by the cartographer with regard to the geographical definition of the Shab'a farms and appeal to all parties to continue to cooperate with the cartographer, who is due to visit the region again in the coming days.

To ensure a durable peace in Lebanon, we call on all the relevant parties in the region to comply fully with the terms of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1701 (2006) and other relevant resolutions, including the need to respect the sovereignty of Lebanon and the legitimacy of its democratically elected Government and institutions.

The political, security and humanitarian situation in the Middle East remains volatile and still constitutes a clear danger to international peace and security. Nothing short of concerted action underpinned by the necessary political will on the part of the relevant actors in the region and the international community will suffice if we are to contain, stabilize and resolve this situation. It is our hope that the forthcoming regional conferences to be convened by the Quartet and the United States-sponsored international conferences on the Middle East expected to take place in the next few months will contribute to the quest for a just, durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Mr. Williams for his excellent briefing on the situation in the region. We thank him for his outstanding work and wish him every success in his new position.

Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union, and since we also share the evaluation of the situation and observations of Mr. Williams, I wish to limit my statement to the following remarks.

As we heard in the briefing, in the past few months we have witnessed several key diplomatic moves, important initiatives and developments concerning the Israeli-Palestinian dispute that we hope will significantly contribute to fostering the peace process in the region and overcoming previous impasses.

I wish to start with welcoming last month's Quartet statement, which accurately reflects the complex situation on the ground and provides, in our opinion, vital ideas on how to proceed further and enhance the prospects for peace in the region. We are convinced that the Quartet represents the most appropriate mechanism for advancing the peace process and we are looking forward to its next meeting here in New York next month and its continuing full engagement.

We also welcome and support the appointment of Mr. Tony Blair as the Quartet Representative. We see this nomination as yet another practical step in enhancing the ongoing peace efforts in the region. The results of his latest visit on 24 and 25 July and the visit of United States Secretary of State Rice on 1 August to the region, which involved meetings held with Israeli and Palestinian representatives, are encouraging. We are looking forward to their expected follow-up.

I would like to use this opportunity to reaffirm our full support to a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is just, comprehensive and lasting and based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, Road Map goals and principles, and negotiations between the two sides. We believe that the international community must mobilize and intensify its efforts to help the parties to achieve this kind of solution as soon as possible in the interest of regional and global peace and security.

In this regard, we welcome and support President Bush's call for an international meeting this autumn in order to move forward the peace process in the Middle East. We also believe that the Arab Peace Initiative retains its importance as a major element for success in resolving the Middle East dispute. We hope that the engagement between the Arab League countries and Israel, as represented, among others, by the recent historic visit of the ministers for foreign affairs of Egypt and Jordan to Israel on 25 July, will bring concrete positive results towards this end.

In addition to the previously mentioned multilateral efforts and diplomatic initiatives, we also stress the need to continue in direct and meaningful political dialogue and meetings between Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Abbas, which are, in our view, key to further progress in achieving the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine living side-by-side in peace. We welcome their meeting yesterday in Jerusalem and hope that such contacts will now become regular and that both leaders will seize and further enhance this positive momentum through concrete and immediate action, including confidence-building measures.

Israel's initial release of a group of Palestinian prisoners and detainees and the partial transfer of withheld Palestinian tax and custom revenues are concrete examples of such actions and are welcome vital steps forward. However, we also reiterate our call on Israel to complete the release of the remaining and future Palestinian funds, to release the Palestinian legislators in its custody and to continue to meet its further Road Map commitments, which will support progress in the peace process.

As for the Palestinian side, we reiterate our support for President Mahmoud Abbas and the measures he has undertaken aimed at bringing the situation in the Palestinian territories under control and restoring law and order. We also support the Palestinian Government under the premiership of Mr. Salam Fayyad. Our support was personally reaffirmed by my Foreign Minister, Mr. Ján Kubiš, during his visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories at the beginning of July.

As far as the situation on the ground is concerned, it is of the utmost importance not to forget the continuing critical humanitarian situation, which first and foremost affects the people of Gaza. We must not abandon them. It is imperative to work to find ways to open border crossings in order to allow humanitarian and commercial flows in and out of Gaza. In that regard, we also call upon Hamas to end its illegal actions in Gaza, which are outside the rule of law and the framework of the Palestinian Authority, which we consider the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

At the same time we strongly condemn the rocket attacks launched from Gaza against Israeli civilian targets and populations. We reiterate our call for an immediate end to violence by Palestinian factions and to attacks on Israel, as well as for the release of the abducted Israeli soldier, Corporal Shalit.

As for Israel, we believe it has the right of self-defence against terrorism and its perpetrators. Although we understand its anxiety over the safety and well-being of its citizens, we stress that Israel's measures and responses must always be proportionate and respectful of international law, including as regards the protection of civilians.

Briefly turning to Lebanon now, we remain deeply concerned about the continuing instability and political deadlock, which have paralysed the country and are hampering the process of reconciliation and reconstruction. We call upon all parties in Lebanon to resume the national dialogue and to assume their responsibility for bringing about lasting peace in the

country, in the interest of the entire Lebanese population.

We consider the forthcoming presidential elections to be a key moment in the process of normalization and stabilization of the political situation in Lebanon. It is important to ensure that the elections are conducted in a calm and constitutional manner that leads to the election of a President and to the consolidation of the democratic institutions in the country.

We support the democratically and legitimately elected Government of Lebanon. We believe that its legitimacy must not be challenged. The mandate it received from the Lebanese people to lead the country in the 2005 democratic elections must be fully respected by all.

We urge all actors inside and outside the country to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon, as well as to stop foreign interference without delay. In that regard, we believe that the international community must do everything possible to assist Lebanon to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable solution through the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Those resolutions must be respected and fully implemented by all the relevant actors in the region and inside the country.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): Let me start by thanking Mr. Michael Williams, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his statement. We too wish him well in his next endeavour, which we hope will be less turbulent than the one he has just completed.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later today by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In the past several weeks, there has been encouraging movement towards re-igniting the search for peace in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The meetings between Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert have been a positive development, as was the historic visit to Israel undertaken by two Arab foreign ministers representing the League of Arab States to promote the Arab Peace Initiative. The call by United States President Bush for the holding of an international conference on Palestine in the coming months to bring the parties together in order to reinvigorate the peace process has also raised hopes in the Middle East, and indeed beyond the region.

However, those encouraging developments have yet to be translated into progress on the ground in Palestine. The reality is that Palestinians continue to live under occupation, which they have endured for decades. They face daily hardships, compounded by the 550 checkpoints that restrict their movement and access. The violent incursions by the Israeli army into Palestinian areas continue unabated, while Israeli settlements and the separation wall expand, despite international condemnation. Additionally, thousands of Palestinian political prisoners continue to languish in Israeli jails.

On a daily basis, Palestinians in the occupied territories continue to face an Israeli policy that violates the basic principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Those actions undermine positive movements towards peace. In particular, the situation in Gaza deserves our special attention.

A year ago yesterday, 28 August 2006, Mr. Arnold Vercken, Country Director of the World Food Programme in the occupied Palestinian Territory, said the following about Gaza:

> "The economy is really reaching rock bottom. Industries which were once the backbone of Gaza's economy and food system, such as the agriculture and fishing industries, are suffocated by the current situation and risk losing all viability." (*United Nations News Centre, web-page, 28 August 2006*)

Mr. Vercken went on to report that the destruction of nearly 400 hectares of agricultural land, including irrigation pipes and greenhouses, had left farmers destitute with no support to re-cultivate their land. He went on to say that Gaza's infrastructure lay crippled, affecting the lives of the 1.4 million population on a daily basis. He also said that power and water supplies remain low and unreliable.

In an attempt to reconcile the hopeful signs with the continuing tragic situation on the ground, Ambassador Riyad Mansour, the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, wrote in his letter of

26 July 2007 addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council that

> "These opportunities must be seized and built upon and the illegal actions of Israel, which move us all in the opposite direction, must be rejected, and Israel must be compelled to cease its violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, to abide by resolutions of international legitimacy and to seriously pursue peace in good faith." (*S/2007/459, fifth paragraph*)

The international community bears the responsibility to ensure that political progress in Palestine is coupled with a change for the better in the lives of ordinary Palestinians. The Council, with its Charter-mandated responsibility for international peace and security, cannot afford to ignore the suffering of the Palestinian people. Inaction on the part of the Council will always be misunderstood as condoning the suffering on the ground.

Once again, my delegation wishes to reiterate that the way forward to peace must include the establishment of an independent State of Palestinian, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel, with both States enjoying secure and internationally recognized borders. That vision of a two-State solution has already been enshrined in resolution 1397 (2002). We cannot allow that vision to fade.

Mr. Lacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to thank the Secretariat, and particularly Mr. Michael Williams, for the briefing on the situation in the Middle East. And I should like to take this opportunity, at a time when he is leaving his post, to thank Mr. Williams for his remarkable work over the past few years and to wish him every success in his new responsibilities.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be made shortly by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

The Secretariat's briefing once again enables us to assess the scope of the difficulties on the ground and to see the absolute need to make immediate progress towards a settlement.

Some reasons for hope have recently appeared. However, in each of these cases, we must go much further so that we can get past what the President of the French Republic has called the hopeless feeling that peace is not moving forward and even moving backward in minds and hearts.

A first decisive element will be the capacity to rebuild a strong Palestinian Authority and to reinforce its authority. France will spare no effort in that regard at the national level and within the framework of the European Union. In particular, we will lend our full support to the efforts of the new Quartet Representative, Mr. Tony Blair.

But it is primarily through their own actions that the two parties will create the conditions for a solidification of the Palestinian Authority. The phased Israeli measures to strengthen the Palestinian Authority, taken at Sharm el-Sheikh on 25 June and during the meetings in Jerusalem on 16 July and in Jericho on 6 August, are thus in the right direction, and France welcomes them. To meet the current challenges, however, they must be broader.

Thus, at this juncture it is essential to remedy the insecurity of the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza, where it continues to deteriorate and where the economy is close to collapse. It is urgent that concrete measures be taken to make it possible to reopen the Karni terminal and other crossing points to Gaza and the West Bank. We also call once again on all actors on the ground to respect international humanitarian law and to shoulder their responsibility for the protection of civilians.

More generally speaking, more substantial measures would establish the benchmarks for a settlement by reinforcing the Palestinian Authority. In particular, I am thinking of the release of a larger number of prisoners, a lifting of the restrictions on movement in the West Bank and even the dismantling of unauthorized settlements and the halting of settlement expansion.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority must show that it is fully exercising its authority by mercilessly combating terrorism and stepping up its efforts to obtain the immediate release of Gilad Shalit. To that end, France is counting on the efforts of President Abbas, to whom we reaffirm our full support. The appointment of Mr. Salam Fayyad to the post of Prime Minister has opened a new chapter. Eventually, the resumption of the inter-Palestinian dialogue will be necessary to avoid a lasting rupture between Gaza and the West Bank. France remains attached to Palestinian

unity and to the preservation of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority.

Over and above that, it is crucial to immediately re-launch a genuine momentum for peace leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State. Indeed, it is essential to give the peoples a political perspective. Thus, France notes with interest the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. We also consider the holding of an international conference in the autumn to be a positive element.

We must do everything possible to strengthen the momentum that seems to be developing. The Quartet must thus play its full role by supporting a solution whose broad outlines we know: the establishment of an independent, sovereign, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. The Quartet meeting planned for September will be an important opportunity to make progress in that regard with the countries of the region, particularly Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which have leading roles to play in promoting peace in the Middle East.

Finally, France believes that if we make progress towards an agreement, the international community, and particularly the Security Council, must be prepared to provide guarantees enabling both parties to have the confidence necessary to implement a possible agreement. Thus, France, convinced that peace will be negotiated first between Israelis and Palestinians, is resolved to take or support any useful initiative.

Mr. Chávez (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are meeting, as we do every month, to consider the situation in the Middle East. First of all, we must note with concern the persistence of the intra-Palestinian conflict, which continues to claim victims in the Palestinian population itself.

In addition to the human losses, this conflict, it must be said, has other consequences at the humanitarian and economic levels that obstruct the peace process. Economic activity in the occupied territory, including the Gaza Strip, is being greatly affected by the closure of businesses and the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. Under those conditions, the risk of a permanent collapse exists and must be avoided.

Therefore, the international community must, in a constructive spirit, ensure the provision of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people and continue its efforts to raise their standard of living, which continues to deteriorate dramatically. In addition, the Israeli authorities, without compromising their security, must guarantee the flows needed for the movement of persons and goods and must not reduce the activities of the people of this region to dependence on humanitarian assistance.

The other main task continues to be ensuring effective administration throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. That is essential in order to prevent deterioration in the quality of daily life, to control attacks against Israeli civilian targets and to prevent internal arms trafficking. In that context, we highlight the appointment of Mr. Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. We are convinced that his leadership, in fulfilment of his mandate, will contribute to the strengthening of Palestinian institutions, particularly in key areas for the population such as education, health and security.

Moreover, we believe that Israel must also take steps on the ground, particularly by suspending the establishment of new settlements in the occupied territories and by beginning to dismantle and halt the construction of the separation wall, whose presence and significance are contrary to the agreements and the spirit of coexistence and peace. As has been said, the obstacles to the movement of Palestinians hamper efforts to reduce tension and cause severe economic and social deterioration.

On the diplomatic front we recognize the positive dialogue between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert and we encourage its continuation, particularly taking into account the initiative of the United States President George Bush to hold an international meeting this autumn to re-launch the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and move towards the objective of establishing a viable and independent Palestinian State. Peru's wish is that the initiative will draw in all those actively involved in the process and that the agreements reached will be binding on all those involved, so that the peace process may be implemented in an effective and comprehensive manner.

It is also necessary to bear in mind that the question of the occupation of the Syrian Golan remains pending and that the door to negotiations between the parties must remain open in order to reach a solution.

On the subject of Lebanon, we are concerned by the continuing political crisis in the country that issues primarily from the actions of armed groups acting outside State authority. The Lebanese political forces must resume national dialogue leading to an agreement and to the restoration of the sovereignty of the State throughout its territory.

Peru welcomes the recent unanimous renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and we reiterate our tribute to the troops who perished in the line of duty. We condemn the armed groups that attacked the United Nations Blue Helmets. We also reiterate our call to fully respect the Blue Line and to cease all acts that violate sovereignty on both sides of the Line and constitute a threat to security.

My delegation hopes that the recommendations of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team can be implemented soon and calls on the Government of Lebanon to continue its endeavours.

On the subject of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, we welcome the recent decision by the Netherlands Government to host its headquarters.

As is apparent, the overall situation is precarious and its signals are contradictory. My delegation hopes that the combination of efforts of the various political actors committed to seeking a solution, particularly within the Middle East, will make it possible to resume dialogue on all necessary fronts — which is the only way to reach just, comprehensive and permanent solutions to the long-suffering region.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): Let me start by thanking the Special Coordinator, Mr. Williams, for his briefing, as well as for his endeavours in the pursuit of a solution to the Middle East crisis.

Italy fully aligns itself with the statement that the European Union presidency is to deliver later on.

The most significant development in the Middle East peace process is the intensification of direct talks between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, particularly their meetings of 6 and 28 August. We hope that the parties will continue their efforts with a forward-looking spirit. In that respect, we particularly appreciate the initiative launched by President Bush to convene an international conference this autumn with the double objective of verifying the process of rebuilding the institutions and supporting the bilateral political negotiation process. Although we hope to learn more about its contents and format, the initiative represents a clear signal of the United States' commitment to foster a final settlement in the framework of the efforts underway at the multilateral level. The conference opens up the unprecedented possibility of linking direct progress between the parties to the need for regional stability disclosed in the Arab League's important peace initiative.

On the inter-Palestinian side, while the apparently implacable conflict between Fatah and Hamas persists, the international community should lend its efforts to fostering national reconciliation as soon as the conditions exist. We should aim to support President Abbas, so as to enhance his role as a credible and legitimate interlocutor with Israel. The President of the Palestinian Authority needs to be in a position to offer Palestinian public opinion visible results, especially in terms of improving the conditions of everyday life.

My delegation does not believe in any new proposal that envisions a solution between two peoples and three States. The Palestinian people must remain unified in the shared objective of establishing an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State that exists in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

Italy supports the efforts of President Abbas and the legitimate government of Prime Minister Fayyad. We hope that the current de facto division of the Palestinian Territories can be overcome, and we remain willing to dialogue with all the Palestinian political parties whose programmes and actions reflect the principles enunciated by the Quartet. The Palestinian Territories remain divided, and in the Gaza Strip there has been a sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation. These are matters of deep concern to Italy. We must continue to ensure that emergency relief supplies reach those who are in need, and we are confident that all the parties will work in good faith to keep a humanitarian corridor open.

It is now time to be ambitious, if we wish to seize the window of opportunity created by the renewed dialogue of the parties. Obviously, to move toward the two-State perspective in which we all believe, we need to promote the building of mutual trust between the parties, with measures aimed, on one hand, at improving the overall conditions of the Palestinian people, and on the other, at establishing the prospect of an independent Palestinian State on sound institutional,

economic and security foundations. In that regard, we are confident that the work of the Quartet's Special Representative in the area of capacity-building will make a decisive contribution.

We believe, nevertheless, that being ambitious requires the courage from both parties to start to address, at least in general terms, the core issues for the final status: Jerusalem, the territorial borders and refugees, mindful of the significant progress made on all three issues in the previous negotiations in Camp David and Taba. We have to ensure that the announced conference will play a fundamental role in the advancement of the peace process, also through an enlarged regional dimension.

From that perspective, Italy strongly supports more resolute action on the part of the Quartet to revive the diplomatic process and to offer a definitive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in compliance with Security Council resolutions and the objectives of the Road Map.

On the subject of Lebanon; with regard to the Lebanese domestic situation, we wish to express the hope that with the approach of the presidential elections the general situation in the country will not deteriorate further. The news that we are hearing from Beirut give reason for concern: the forces acting against the stability of Lebanon are, unfortunately, still a real threat. It is imperative for the international community to maintain its support for the Government of Prime Minister Siniora.

Among the many problems that need to be solved in Lebanon, probably the most crucial right now is the election of the President of the Republic, which we hope will take place on schedule after a free and fair electoral process leading to the election of a candidate who is accepted by all of the Lebanese.

While it is true that Lebanese political forces should make every effort to resume talks and overcome the impasse afflicting the country, it is also indispensable that all the countries of the region, particularly Syria, help to promote a political solution to the Lebanese crisis. For our part, we have never ceased to underline this and have repeatedly invited the Syrian authorities to play a positive and effective role in the stability of Lebanon and the entire Middle Eastern area.

We believe it is essential, for the sake of a progressive normalization of the situation on the Lebanese-Israeli border, that the question of the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hizbollah be addressed quickly and settled in a positive manner, also in the framework of a comprehensive exchange of prisoners.

The failure to find a solution to the Shab'a farmlands question is also a cause for concern, since the issue represents a dangerous hotbed of tensions on the border with Israel and fuels the claims of armed groups. We appreciate the work conducted in recent months by the United Nations cartographers and hope that a proposal can soon be outlined as a basis for starting the necessary consultations between the concerned parties, so that the farmlands area can be rapidly placed under United Nations control while awaiting an agreement on the borders between Syria and Lebanon.

Mr. Suescum (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank Mr. Williams for his briefing and his significant work on the Middle East and we wish him success in his future endeavours. The news he gave us of progress made in the discussions between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert is very positive, but the general situation remains serious. We are concerned that particular stances taken by some members of the international community may represent, what Mr. Williams calls, "factors that may derail long-term endeavours and efforts".

Regarding the Palestine-Israel peace process, the international community, in our view, has two paths before it. The first is to seek new Palestinian unity and support a two-State solution involving the entire Palestinian population. The second course, which would appear to have already been selected by some stakeholders in the process, consists of a two-pronged policy of supporting the Government of President Abbas in the West Bank and isolating Hamas in Gaza.

Our delegation expresses its disagreement with any policy that exacerbates the division of the Palestinian Authority. This Council has called for unity and national reconciliation through inclusive dialogue and, likewise, we encourage the main protagonists in the peace process to promote national unity in Palestine through all diplomatic channels available including opening channels of dialogue with Hamas.

Hamas represents a considerable proportion of the Palestinian population, and this representation

cannot be excluded from the Palestinian Government. However, Hamas must be a responsible actor in the process that would lead to the eventual creation of a viable Palestinian State. As long as it fails to accept that the solution to the Palestine question is one of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace, Hamas will remain an obstacle to national unity and, as such, will not be able to participate in the peace process.

Israel, too, can and should do much to carry the process forward. It should put an end to the illegal construction of the Wall and the settlements in the West Bank. In addition, it should permit a better flow of essential goods into the Gaza Strip and prevent its impending economic collapse. The creation of a viable Palestinian State presupposes a stable Gaza Strip. Actions demonstrating Israel's good will would help tremendously in this regard.

On the subject of Lebanon, we await the presidential elections of next month. It is extremely important that these elections be carried out with transparency and in line with the constitution, in an atmosphere of peace. Equally important is that the results under these conditions be accepted by all Lebanese parties and the international community. The solution to the situation in Lebanon and lasting peace in the region resides in the establishment of a government of Lebanese unity that will bring an end to the political stagnation that has kept the country down for almost an entire year.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We too thank Mr. Williams for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East peace process. We would like to join with colleagues in expressing high praise for the active and professional activities of Mr. Williams in his important post. We wish Mr. Williams every success in his new appointment, one that is also directly linked to settlement of the Middle East situation.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be complex and contradictory. Alongside the profound and ongoing crisis within the Palestinian National Authority, after the events in June, there has been some encouraging progress in Palestinian-Israeli relations. A positive factor, of course, is the current absence of large-scale violence. Although, unfortunately, there are still victims. But it is important to increase the tempo and to enhance the effectiveness of efforts for a comprehensive settlement in the region, in all aspects.

A source of a certain degree of optimism is the fact that contacts between Mr. Abbas and Mr. Olmert, the latest of which was held on 28 August in Jerusalem, are becoming regular. Their agenda is becoming more substantive. However, at present, their stress is still on day to day, although still important, issues whereas the main problem relates to the development of political contours and the issue of a final independent status. This, in our view, requires accelerated work by involved parties, along with collective and constructive international assistance, including from the Quartet and international mediators.

A de facto dual authority continues to exist in the Palestinian territories. The rift between Fatah and Hamas is not only destabilizing the situation, it is also having a negative impact on the prospect for progress towards a long-term settlement with Israel. Russia has consistently supported the Palestinian Constitutional structure and the head of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas and this was particularly reinforced during Mr. Abbas' recent visit to Moscow. At the same time, we believe that there is no alternative to intra-Palestinian unity and harmony. This is extremely important, if durable and lasting peace is to be achieved in the Middle East. It is clear that any possible agreements with Israel will need to enjoy the broadest possible support among Palestinians.

The socio-economic situation in the territories of the Palestinian National Authority, and particularly in Gaza, are a source of profound concern. At this time, Russian humanitarian assistance is being sent there. We expect Israel to take additional steps in order to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. All parties need to observe all previously assumed obligations and above all, as far as the Palestinian side is concerned, they need to combat terrorism. At the same time, we note the inadmissibility of the Israeli practice of targeted eliminations, the construction of settlements and the continuation of the Wall.

In these present conditions, the search for collective achievements towards Arab-Israeli reconciliation remains fundamentally important and, in this connection, we have supported the idea of convening an international meeting this autumn on a Middle East settlement. We hope that at the ministerial meeting of the Quartet, which is planned for 23 September in New York,

agreement will be reached on format, modalities, agenda and international legal basis.

At previous conferences of the Quartet, an agreement was reached on the active participation of the Quartet in the proposed activities of the meeting. Our position is that the forthcoming meeting may promote progress towards a comprehensive peace and, in this context, may assist with preparations for a representative international conference on the Middle East. We see the role of such a full-format conference as to be a relaunching of the peace process in all of its aspects. Participation by Syria and Lebanon, in our opinion, will assist in making the forum productive and will contribute to the task of reaching a comprehensive Middle East solution and settlement. A strategic benchmark in this respect is that any settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict must be based on an internationally recognized legal platform, such as the resolutions of the Security Council, the Madrid Principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We remain profoundly concerned about the continuing political crisis in Lebanon. We call on the Lebanese parties and groups to search assiduously for compromise solutions through national dialogue and to consider seriously the proposed initiatives which will make it possible to avoid more fighting this year. Above all, one matter that is extremely important to life in Lebanon is the presidential election. We need to give the Lebanese constructive external support and to expand the political and social basis of intra-Lebanese agreement. The United Nations still has an important role to play in this process, including through the stabilizing role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the mandate of which the Security Council recently extended for a year.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking the Special Coordinator for his detailed and characteristically well-judged briefing to the Council. As this is his last appearance before us, I would like to express the United Kingdom's appreciation for all he has done for the United Nations over the last few years, both in his present appointment and in previous ones. His work on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and on the Middle East peace process generally, speaks for itself. We will all miss you in New York, Michael, and we offer our best wishes to you in your next role.

As this is my first Security Council debate on the situation in the Middle East, I should like to take the opportunity to reiterate the basic elements that underpin my Government's approach to the peace process. These are: first, support for the two-State solution; second, working with all those in the region committed to peace; and, third, improving the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza.

It is clear from the interventions of colleagues that there is much common ground. There are reasons for cautious optimism. There is the continued dialogue between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, which we hope will include meaningful discussion of permanent status issues. There is a new focus, in the appointment of Tony Blair, for the Quartet's and the wider international community's efforts to reinvigorate the peace process, in particular by building the institutions of a future Palestinian state, and by developing the Palestinian economy. There are intensifying international efforts, proposals for a donor conference and, in particular, the international meeting on the Middle East convened by the United States president. There are discussions on the Arab Peace Initiative, which we hope will build on the historic visit to Israel by Arab League representatives last month.

These developments provide us with a clear agenda for progress, which we should not allow to be derailed by events. Of course, we must not underestimate the huge challenges we face. One of the most urgent priorities for the international community is to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We all need to continue to show strong political and practical support for President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad's Government. We welcome the transfer by Israel this month of $160 million of Palestinian clearance revenues. It is important that these transfers continue. And we look to the Government of Israel to take further steps to improve the daily lives of the Palestinian people.

I would like to say a few words about Lebanon. The parliamentary elections to select a new president next month will be an important milestone on the path to restoring stability in Lebanon. The United Kingdom welcomes the efforts of international partners, in particular, France and the Arab League, to secure a way through the current political impasse.

We also welcome this Council's decision to renew the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for another year. UNIFIL has made a vital contribution to maintaining stability and security in southern Lebanon since the conflict last year.

There is a wider need for concerted action to implement fully resolution 1701 (2006). Action to put an end to arms smuggling across the Syria/Lebanon border will be particularly important. That will require robust follow-up to the mission of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team to ensure that its recommendations are taken forward.

The United Kingdom believes this work should take place in tandem with efforts to reduce Israeli overflights and to work towards a resolution of the Sheba'a farms dispute.

Finally, the United Kingdom looks forward to the Secretary-General's 90-day progress report on the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. We remain determined to support the Lebanese people and Government in their efforts to bring to justice those responsible for the murder of Rafik Hariri and that of others.

I also associate myself with the statement to be made later by the Permanent Representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Verbeke (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Like my other European colleagues, in my following comments, I align myself with the statement to be made by Portugal on behalf of the European Union later today.

Belgium welcomes the direct contacts particularly in Jericho between the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Olmert, and the Palestinian President, Mr. Abbas. This dialogue constitutes a major step forward in the quest for a durable solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. We must encourage them to continue along this course.

The Quartet has met several times over the last few months. Its renewed vitality is reflected in part in the appointment of Mr. Blair as its representative. We await his first report at the next meeting of the Quartet here in New York on 23 September.

Regional initiatives also are very topical. For Belgium, the Arab Peace Initiative remains key to regional peace. We know that a high-level international meeting on the Middle East is also scheduled for this autumn and it is important that this meeting should genuinely be viewed as an opportunity not to be missed by any of the parties involved, directly or indirectly, in the process.

Belgium appeals to the parties to undertake specific actions to improve the situation of the population. The deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is a cause for concern. Reopening the Karni Terminal for both imports and exports is of critical importance to avoid the total collapse of the economy in the Gaza Strip, with the all too predictable humanitarian consequences.

In Lebanon, all political forces should focus on seeking a solution to the current political impasse. That is all the more important given the prospect of the upcoming presidential elections. Belgium is pleased to note that all parties in Lebanon state that they are ready to work on the matter. Now is the time for words to be translated into deeds, and for specific measures to be taken to ensure that the elections really do take place in due time and with respect for democratic rules. I call on all sides to act with a sense of urgency and responsibility.

The renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is a way for the international community to show its firm determination to continue to support Lebanon on its journey towards total recovery of its sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

The attack last June which targeted UNIFIL and cost the lives of six Blue Helmets reminds us of the need to step up our efforts to ensure the security of troops, but it has certainly not shaken the determination of the international community, nor of Belgium specifically, to continue to fulfil this mission.

I would like to end by thanking both personally and on behalf of my Government Mr. Michael Williams for his outstanding work, imbued with a great sense of responsibility, that he performed for the United Nations and for its Member States during the past year. Belgium believes that he will continue in his new capacity to contribute to the quest for a durable peace for the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Republic of the Congo.

I thank Mr. Williams, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, for his very informative statement, the content of which has been duly noted by the Congolese delegation.

In a precarious and volatile environment, we note positive signs that are important milestones along the path to the relaunching of the peace process in the region. As we all know, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be found through arms. Thus there is a need for the international community to firmly support the initiatives and efforts being undertaken at various levels in order to achieve the two-State solution, Israel and Palestine living side-by-side in peace and security in accordance with the Road Map and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. Certainly, the security situation on the ground continues to be a source of concern, and my delegation strongly condemns all acts of violence and provocation, whatever their source.

We also remain extremely concerned by the continuing deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza. The organized shortages and restrictions on movement of the population of the occupied territories and of humanitarian personnel are intolerable, because they aggravate a situation that is already disastrous and are making this territory a veritable open-air prison. The international community, in particular the principle donors, must contribute effectively to easing the difficulties of the daily life of the Palestinian people — all of the Palestinian people.

My delegation deplores once again the violent nature of inter-Palestinian clashes, which unfortunately have led to a de facto split between Gaza and the West Bank, thus compromising the idea of a democratic and viable Palestinian State. We urge the Palestinian people to draw on their patriotic resources and regain their unity with the assistance of the States of the region, in particular in the spirit of the agreement reached in Mecca, Saudi Arabia on 8 February 2007.

The Middle East Quartet, for its part, must redouble its efforts in accordance with its mission, which is to restore peace in the region by putting an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and by creating the conditions necessary for the establishment of the Palestinian State. My delegation notes and welcomes the latest initiatives of the Quartet, particularly the declaration made at Lisbon on 19 July 2007 regarding the convening of an international meeting on the initiative of the President of the United States of America, mentioned in his statement of 16 July 2007.

We also welcome the recent arrangements by the Secretary-General to implement the conclusions of the Quartet, measures that were in fact endorsed by our Council on 24 August with regard to the mandate of Mr. Tony Blair, the Quartet representative, and the establishment and the functioning of his office in Jerusalem.

The Congo expects the international meeting on the Middle East to be able to help protagonists in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to achieve substantial progress in the forthcoming negotiations. In the meantime, we call on both parties to avoid any unilateral actions or measures which might undermine confidence. In this respect, we welcome the release by Israel of 250 Palestinian prisoners and the restoration to the Palestinian Authority of previously frozen financial assets. We also welcome the resumption of bilateral talks between the Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, talks that we feel should go beyond security and humanitarian arrangements in order to focus on substantive issues and move on to new stages.

As regards Lebanon, my delegation welcomes efforts being made at various levels to prevent that country, which we cherish, from sinking once again into violence. We note the tireless efforts of certain countries that are friends of Lebanon. These efforts should be supported by the entire international community.

We would like to reaffirm the position expressed by the Council on 3 August 2007 through the presidential statement issued following the discussion on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/PRST/2007/29). We also welcome the adoption by the Council on 24 August 2007 of resolution 1773 (2007), which renews the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for another year.

One year after the war of summer 2006, Lebanon is still faced with major challenges as regards its

political independence, its sovereignty, its unity and its territorial integrity. We remain convinced that only a responsible national dialogue will make it possible to find solutions to the many questions that remain unresolved relating to constitutional issues, electoral perspectives and legal disputes.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, the Republic of the Congo, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. We have full confidence that the work of the Council will be successful under your able and wise stewardship. I express our profound appreciation as well to the Permanent Representative of China for his adept leadership of the Council during the month of July.

At this time, I would also like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr. Michael Williams, for his briefing to the Council today on the current situation in our region and to thank him on behalf of Palestine for the role he played during his short tenure. We wish him every success in his new post in London, which will allow him to remain in contact with us and the question of Palestine.

When addressing the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, we cannot but refer to the reality of what is actually happening on the ground. I repeat, we cannot but refer to the reality of what is actually happening on the ground. As depressing, negative and frustrating as these facts may be — and as repetitive as it may sound — this is the tragic reality of the Palestinian people living under Israel's occupation. It is our duty as the representatives of the Palestinian people here at the United Nations to continuously bring this situation to the attention of the Security Council until Israel, the occupying Power, ceases — or is compelled to cease — its illegal policies and practices.

Israel's unlawful policies and incessant violations of international law continue to cause severe hardships for the Palestinian civilian population, to compound the difficult situation on the ground and to undermine any peace efforts. Indeed, the cessation of such illegal policies and practices is a prerequisite for making peace, a delicate process that requires good will and a stable environment conducive to truly reviving and advancing peace negotiations.

Regrettably, in the months that have passed since I addressed the Council in April, Israel, the occupying Power, continued to commit violations and grave breaches of international law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Israeli occupying forces continue to carry out repeated military raids, assaults and incursions throughout the occupied territory, terrifying, killing and injuring more Palestinian civilians, including many children. They continue to use excessive, indiscriminate and lethal force against the defenceless Palestinians in addition to extrajudicial killings. At the same time, Israeli occupation forces persist in their attacks, spreading havoc in the property of Palestinian civilians, including their homes and cultivated land, as well as destroying their infrastructure and aiming at the unlawful confiscation of Palestinian lands.

Despite the fact that over 200 Palestinian prisoners have been released, Israel continues arbitrarily to detain and imprison thousands of Palestinians. That includes 112 women and at least 300 children. This is in addition to other violent house-to-house detention campaigns that are carried out daily. Such illegal and destructive acts by Israel, the occupying Power, exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people at all levels. They also cause further deterioration of the situation, fuelling violence and tension.

At the same time, Israel is continuing to pursue its unlawful colonization campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The occupying Power is continuing to construct and expand its illegal settlements in the West Bank, particularly in and around the area of occupied East Jerusalem. It is also continuing to transfer Israeli settlers to the occupied territory on a daily basis — at a rate of approximately 1.5 busloads of settlers per day, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In addition, Israel is continuing to unlawfully construct the wall in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In doing so it is confiscating more Palestinian land, demolishing more property of Palestinian civilians and causing more damage to the

environment and further fragmenting the Palestinian territory in pursuit of this illegal and destructive plan.

All of that is being done in grave breach of international law, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention, in serious violation of United Nations resolutions, in total disrespect for the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and in disregard of the provisions of the Quartet's road map. Both the settlements and the wall are destroying the territorial contiguity and integrity of the Palestinian territory and must be dismantled — I repeat, they must be dismantled. Their continued presence seriously undermines the viability of the two-State solution, and thus the prospects for peace.

While further fragmenting the Palestinian territory and separating Palestinian population centres into isolated and barely viable cantons, Israel is also maintaining a discriminatory road network and permit system, with more than 550 checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Prolonged closures and severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinian persons and goods are arbitrarily and routinely imposed by the occupying Power. Such practices amount to collective punishment of the Palestinian people, in violation of international humanitarian law. Moreover, those measures violate the freedom of movement of our citizens, as well as their other basic human rights. They also continue to cause great damage to the already frail economy, to hinder development and to worsen the humanitarian crisis.

In that regard, while the wall and checkpoints have been more damaging to socio-economic life in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip has been more affected by the continuing closure of the crossings into and out of the territory. Only limited human and material traffic is permitted to pass through the checkpoints when they are infrequently opened for short periods of time. The closures, in addition to Gaza's continued separation from the West Bank due to the lack of territorial link between the two areas of the territory — both in violation of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access — have exacerbated humanitarian conditions in Gaza and further impoverished its population.

That in brief is the prevailing situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as a result of Israel's continued imposition of illegal policies and measures on the Palestinian people under its occupation. Not only are such actions not conducive to peace negotiations, they are actually in total contradiction of the spirit of peacemaking. What is needed now, as I mentioned earlier, is a complete cessation of all of those unlawful Israeli policies and a demonstration of the good faith and confidence-building measures needed to advance the peace process towards our shared vision of two-States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security.

Of course, any assessment of the situation on the ground today in the occupied Palestinian territory must also take into account the regrettable events that occurred on the Palestinian side in the Gaza Strip in June. Reflecting on those events saddens us. It is with great pain that we refer to those developments, which are alien to the democratic, pluralistic and humane Palestinian tradition. The coup d'état carried out by outlawed militias against the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip is a serious matter, for it threatens the unity of our land — whose integrity and unity has already been gravely undermined by the occupying Power — as well as the unity of our people and our national movement. The situation on the ground in Gaza today must be restored to that which existed prior to the events of June 2007, to allow for the maintenance of the unity of our people and land.

In that connection, we reaffirm the statement made by President Abbas to the Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), namely, that our goal remains that of the establishment of the Palestinian State on all of the occupied Palestinian territory, including the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Moreover, President Abbas emphasized that the Palestinian land and people are one, and that they will never be divided.

The situation of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, the majority of whom are living under very difficult circumstances and enduring severe socio-economic and humanitarian hardships, is among the high priorities on the Palestinian agenda. We shall spare no effort to assist them until the abnormal situation that now prevails in Gaza is redressed. In that regard, we will continue to call upon, and to actively engage, the international community, including here at the United Nations, to help in any and all ways possible to alleviate the hardships being experienced by our people in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular those suffering in Gaza.

Despite the difficulties we face as a result of the continuation of Israel's illegal policies and practices and the additional difficulties arising from the situation in Gaza, we now have before us a significant opportunity to move towards ending Israel's occupation and the attainment of the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. That would entail the establishment of the Palestinian State in all the areas occupied by Israel since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the achievement of a just and agreed solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of 1948.

It is in that spirit that we see the positive aspects of the recent speech by United States President George Bush, in which he called for the convening of an international conference in the autumn to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by ending the occupation and achieving the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. We believe that the basis for such a conference is well known: it consists of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the principle of land for peace. There is thus no need to create a new basis, since the existing basis for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict contains the basic elements for peacemaking.

What we need now are the political will and resolve to push this process forward, making it possible for a Palestinian State to be swiftly established, because the occupation has now been imposed on us for more than 40 years, too much damage has already been done to our people, and our people are desperately yearning for peace and their freedom. All concerned parties and all those who support the two-State solution and a peaceful Middle East should be involved in the upcoming conference, which has always been the forum preferred by the Palestinian and Arab sides for resolving the conflict.

Ultimately, the conference — which could be transformed so that it is under United Nations auspices — could make it possible to find a just, lasting and comprehensive solution based on the tenets of international legitimacy. It could also pave the way for the participation of those countries that wish to contribute in a concrete and constructive way to the building of a future sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State and that could monitor compliance with the peace treaty that we hope will be signed as the final outcome of the international peace conference.

Energetically and in good faith, President Abbas is engaging his counterpart, Mr. Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel, to prepare constructively for what we hope will be a fruitful and successful conference in the autumn.

Although it is far too early to come to any serious conclusions, we note the emergence of positive signals in addition to President Bush's speech. For instance, there are the activities and meetings of the Arab foreign ministers in that regard, including the Arab League mission to Israel by the foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan to formally present the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for a comprehensive, just and permanent solution to the entire Arab-Israeli conflict. There are the recent visits to the region and the meetings held by Ms. Condoleezza Rice, United States Secretary of State; the recent meeting in Moscow between President Mahmoud Abbas and President Vladimir Putin; and the important meeting of the Quartet principals in Lisbon, at which Mr. Tony Blair was officially appointed as Quartet Special Envoy.

Those signals and activities have been very important, because they may give our people hope for a solution within the near future that will end their long suffering and oppression. Indeed, it is our most earnest hope that together, all of these efforts can build the momentum necessary to help us overcome the obstacles that we all currently face and move forward on the path towards peace by producing serious understandings and agreements leading to the long-awaited meaningful negotiations between the two sides on final-status issues concerning borders, Jerusalem and the Palestinian refugees. Those essential components must be resolved before the establishment of a Palestinian State and the achievement of the peace in the Middle East that we all seek.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): I wish to join my colleagues in thanking Mr. Michael Williams for his informative briefing and, even more, for his commitment and dedication to his important and challenging mission. His dedication and service have been exemplary and have truly made a difference. We thank him for all he has done and wish him well in the future.

Let me briefly share with the Council a number of positive developments on the Israeli-Palestinian front. Those developments, it should be understood, occurred against the backdrop of, and in spite of, the continuing danger — now acknowledged by all — posed by the extremists in our region, Hamas and Hizbullah, which are backed and supported by their evil patrons in Tehran and Damascus.

Just yesterday, Prime Minister Olmert met again at length with President Abbas to discuss the development of Palestinian institutions and mutual issues concerning Israel and the Palestinians living side by side. At least two more meetings will be held in the near future to promote and advance the bilateral track. A day earlier, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni had a meeting with Prime Minister Fayyad, at which the two discussed enhanced economic and civilian cooperation. They also agreed to hold direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian heads of local authorities and representatives of organizations to advance cooperative projects.

Israel has also undertaken additional steps to bolster the Palestinian Authority, including releasing tax funds, freeing more than 250 Palestinian prisoners and granting amnesty to those who renounce terror and violence.

As we can see, Israel and the Palestinian Authority are actively speaking, engaging with each other and working together. That is due to the many crucial choices made by the Palestinians. As just one example, the action taken by the Palestinian security forces this past Monday morning in Jenin, when they assisted an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officer who had mistakenly entered the city, demonstrates the strengthening of the Palestinian Government in its efforts to combat terrorism and its commitment to working with Israel to enhance security.

It is in that context that I must express my sadness at witnessing once again the dichotomy between the positive developments on the ground and the repetitive Palestinian narrative. I can only express my hope that, eventually, reality and common sense will prevail and bridge the void between an age-old ritual and the real world in which we live. Yes, there are problems on the ground on both sides, but it is our duty to build on the positive and promote hope, rather than to continue the futile process of doom and recriminations. Our hope lies in the promise of tomorrow, not in being hostage to yesterday.

Yes, the Palestinian people have made some important choices, but unfortunately the right choices are not being made by everyone. While the moderates have chosen an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, the extremists have chosen violence and instability, threatening both Israeli and Palestinian security. In Hamastan, in the Gaza Strip, we see the exact opposite of the positive choices made in the West Bank.

In Gaza, Hamas hurriedly constructs positions and fortifications, building tunnels for fighting and smuggling explosives, anti-tank weapons and rockets through the desert. Hamas has even sent its terrorists for training in Iran so that they can attack Israel.

Iran, the world's terror haven, is continuing to destabilize our region. On the morning of 25 August, IDF forces foiled a terrorist attack on the town of Netiv Ha'asara north of the Gaza Strip. Imagine the blood, death and carnage if the attack had not been prevented. Lives were saved this time, but who knows when the next attempt will be.

Since 1 August, Hamas has smuggled more than 13 tons of explosives and 150 rocket-propelled grenades into Gaza. Some 40 tons of explosives were smuggled in the past three months. Moreover, 56 terror attacks, among them the firing of 20 Qassam rockets occurred last week alone. Close to 70 rockets were fired by Palestinian terrorists during August, marking a sharp increase in rocket terror activity.

Two days ago, Corporal Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier kidnapped by Hamas on 25 June last year, celebrated his twenty-first birthday, but not at home with friends and family as most of us do. Gilad Shalit celebrated his birthday for the second year now in captivity, alone in an undoubtedly dark and cold place, devoid of the warmth and life he deserves. Hamas still holds Gilad, creating a severe humanitarian situation. I ask you to consider the shattering darkness Gilad experienced on his twenty-first birthday and what must be done to secure his immediate release and safe return.

In spite of the volatile security situation in the Gaza Strip, Israel continues to respond to humanitarian needs there. Since 19 June, more than 60,000 tons of humanitarian aid was transferred from Israel to the Gaza Strip in cooperation with the Gaza District

Coordination and Liaison Office. Israel remains committed to ensuring the timely and safe passage of aid through the appropriate channels.

If we consider all this, we see that important choices are being made on the ground. A huge difference can be seen in the moderate and pragmatic choices being made in the West Bank and the extremist and violent choices being made in Gaza. The masks have now been removed. Hamas is not just choosing extremism over moderation; it wishes to forcefully convert the world to its hateful, violent and venomous ideology and instil terror and fear in the hearts of those who do not share its evil world view. Israel for its part, will work with those that make the right choices, under the direction and guidance of the Road Map, to advance the political and economic horizons that sow the seeds of peace.

With regard to the situation along the Blue Line, Israel welcomes the extension of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mandate for another year. The unanimous adoption of resolution 1773 (2007) last week, was an important step in maintaining regional security. Israel expresses its appreciation to the troop-contributing countries, the UNIFIL command, the strategic cell in New York and the troops on the ground. Israel appreciates the difficulty of their task and values their dedication. They are undertaking a most significant and crucial responsibility while faced with the challenges of peacekeeping in our region.

Israel also wishes to join the Council in expressing its condemnation of the recent attacks on UNIFIL forces and to offer condolences to the families of the victims and their countries of origin.

Although it has been over a year since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), the situation in southern Lebanon remains precarious, fragile and unsettling. Here I wish to stress three main areas that demand the Council's vigilant attention and immediate action. The continued detention of our boys, IDF soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, kidnapped by Hizbollah terrorists on 12 June 2006 and the absence of any sign of life pose grave humanitarian concerns. I reiterate my call to the members of the Council to make the utmost effort for their immediate and unconditional release.

In that context, I wish to express my disappointment at the statement made by Indonesia referring to what it termed, "Israel's invasion into Lebanon a year ago". Ignorance is not always bliss. Re-writing history is an affront to the intelligence of the Council. Indeed, a year has passed, but that period should not obliterate the real roots of last summer's conflict. Indonesia itself voted only last year for Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which called for the immediate release of our two boys, whose abduction and brutal holding sparked the conflict. There is an alarming degree of hypocrisy in voting for the resolution last year and ignoring it today. Membership in the Council should carry with it more responsibility.

The presence of armed Hizbollah elements south of the Litani river, and the transfer of weapons from Iran and Syria to Hizbollah in Lebanon, in blatant violation of the arms embargo, is also a cause for grave alarm. Some of those weapons are destined for southern Lebanon and have undoubtedly found their way there. Israel has watched with great concern as Hizbollah reverts to its previous capabilities. In that respect, the passages over the Litani river are crucial.

Lastly, Iran and Syria — the State sponsors of terror in the region and in Lebanon — are re-arming Hizbollah in defiance of resolution 1701 (2006) and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1747 (2007). The international community must see to it that those forces of extremism no longer threaten the well-being and security of the region.

It is not enough for the moderates to merely shun the extremists and shut out their darkness. We must also usher in light and do so through the choices we make and courses we chart. The region must transform gloom into hope. That can only be accomplished through responsible and sensible choices. The international community has made its choice on who to engage and the Palestinians and the Lebanese are making their choices as well. Choosing the right options means choosing a peaceful alternative, the alternative of hope, which is more promising, more secure and more dignified for all. The alternative of peace begins with the people and their choices, and the people of the Middle East, particularly their leaders, must have the wisdom and courage to choose wisely.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of

the Security Council for the month of August and to express my deep appreciation to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of China and his delegation, for their stewardship and wisdom while conducting last month's work. I also wish to thank Mr. Michael Williams for his comprehensive briefing and express our regrets for his departure. My delegation wishes Mr. Williams all the best in his future endeavours and sincerely hope that he will continue his efforts to help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, which remains at the core of the increasingly complex Middle East crisis.

Once again, we meet with this distinguished Council to revisit the situation in my part of the world, where legitimate hopes for a just and durable peace are being crushed and shattered. Aware that this requires bold steps and painful sacrifices, the Arab leaders who met in 2002 in Beirut adopted, as you know, Sir, a peace initiative based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace. In exchange for full Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in June 1967 and for Israel's acceptance of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State to be established in the West Bank and Gaza, along with the achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon pursuant to relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab heads of State offered in this historic initiative: to consider the Arab-Israeli conflict as having ended; to enter into a peace agreement with Israel; to establish — in the context of such a comprehensive peace — normal relations with Israel; and, to ensure that security is provided for all the States in the region.

The 2007 Arab Summit recently held in Riyadh not only renewed the Arab commitment to this peace strategy, but also chose to reinvigorate it through the formation of a follow-up committee entrusted with the task of engaging all concerned parties. Regrettably, however, this offer has still not been met on the Israeli side by a partner capable of truly rising to the challenge of peace. This has increased the responsibility of the international community not to let this opportunity for peace be missed.

In this regard, while welcoming the 17 July proposal of United States President George Bush to hold an international meeting in the coming fall to address the Middle East conflict, we would like to emphasize that any unwarranted conditionality may jeopardize the desired outcome of such a laudable effort.

On 24 August, the Council adopted unanimously resolution 1773 (2007) to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for another year. Although the renewal was meant to remain technical, the political message was no less clear: the Security Council reaffirmed

> "its strong commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized borders and under the sole and exclusive authority of its Government." (resolution 1733 (2007), fourth preambular paragraph)

The Council also reaffirmed its "attachment to the full implementation of all provisions of resolution 1701 of August 2006."

Similarly, my Government remains entirely committed to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), one year after its adoption. In relation to this issue, allow me to draw your attention to the following highly alarming facts:

While my Government welcomed the appointment by the Secretary-General of a facilitator in the matter of the abducted Israeli soldiers, Israel continues to refuse to solve the longstanding issue of the Lebanese detainees who have been aging in Israeli prisons for decades now. We call for and expect their immediate release.

Israel continues its violation of Lebanese airspace in blatant and flagrant violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and of Lebanese sovereignty. The Secretary-General, in his latest interim report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), observed that

> "These violations occur on an almost daily basis frequently numbering between 15 and 20 and have even reached 32 overflights in a single day." (S/2007/392, para. 16)

These overflights, in the words of the Secretary-General, "not only constitute repeated violations" of resolution 1701 (2006) and of other relevant Security Council resolutions, but

> "also undermine the credibility of both UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces in the eyes of the local population, and negatively affect efforts to stabilize the situation on the ground." (ibid.)

After such clear words by the Secretary-General, I feel no need at this time to add a single letter in rebuttal of any contrary fallacious arguments on the matter. Allow me, however, to call for an immediate halt to these violations and for the full respect of Lebanese sovereignty.

The continued Israeli occupation of the Sheb'a farms constitutes a violation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which had in 1978 called upon Israel to "withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory". While we praise the progress achieved by the senior cartographer appointed to determine the territorial definition of the farms, we believe that a political process must also start, based on my Government's proposal in its seven-point plan to put this area under the interim jurisdiction of the United Nations.

During the Israeli aggression on Lebanon last summer, the Israeli army deliberately pounded southern Lebanon with millions of cluster bombs. The 2006 annual report of the United Nations Mine Action Service clearly specifies that over one million have not exploded and have thus become tantamount to anti-personnel land mines, easily capable of claiming more lives and victims. By the end of last June, more than 233 Lebanese civilians had fallen victims to Israeli cluster bombs, many of whom were children.

Israel's decision to drop those cluster bombs in the first place constitutes a blatant violation of international humanitarian law, since such munitions are by nature non-discriminatory and may cause unnecessary suffering to the civilian population. Moreover, Israel's persistent refusal to give the United Nations the maps that indicate where it dropped the cluster bombs is an additional flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, since the remaining unexploded bomblets represent a continuous threat to the safety and security of the Lebanese civilian population.

My Government is determined to clean Lebanon of Israel's cluster bombs and put an end to the sufferings they cause to my countrymen in southern Lebanon. Moreover, on behalf of every Lebanese man and woman who was killed, maimed, disfigured or injured by a cluster bomb, on behalf of every Lebanese child who was playing outside his home and never came back and on behalf of every Lebanese child who is threatened by the possibility of not coming back home, my Government pledges before you that it shall not spare any effort to reach an international ban on cluster bombs, so that those most ugly weapons become things of the past.

This pledge is not the only good news from Lebanon I wish to put before you today. I would also like to assure you of the unwavering determination of my Government and its army to put an end to the terrorist group Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr al-Bared camp and not allow it to continue threatening the stability of my country. May I ask you as well to note that in the midst of this fight, my Government took the initiative to address the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian refugees who had to leave the camp and that it hopes that, with the aid of the international community, the reconstruction of the camp and the return of its inhabitants will not take long to materialize.

Let me also mention that in my country on 5 August by-elections in Beirut and the Matn district were held to replace two assassinated members of parliament. The good news here lies in the fact that despite the fierce political campaign that accompanied those by-elections and the tight race between the contending candidates, the process went smoothly and without one single serious act of violence being reported. Moreover, these by-elections represented the democratic answer to the terrorist killings, and the fact that the opposition candidate won one of the two contested seats is the latest proof of the vitality of Lebanon's democracy in our part of the world and a source of pride to my Government. We also hope that the upcoming presidential election will bear additional witness to my country's entrenched democracy.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me to begin by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for August 2007. I cannot but wholeheartedly thank the Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China, Ambassador Wang Guangya, and the members of his delegation for the able manner in which they led the Council in its work during July.

I would also like to address Mr. Michael Williams, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who is participating today in his last

briefing to the Security Council. I truly wish that his new post will allow him to continue to make sincere efforts to activate and promote a just and comprehensive peace process in the Middle East region.

We meet here today to discuss once again the situation in the Middle East, an item that the continued Israeli occupation has caused us to remain seized of. For decades now, the Security Council has failed to find a solution to end that occupation for reasons that are known to everyone. Due to this failure, the Israeli occupation of Arab lands has been transformed over time from an Israeli military occupation and annexation by force of the territories of others to colonial, provocative and aggressive settler activity based on fait accompli and on continued acts of aggression, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, against the Palestinian people and against our citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan.

The Charter of the United Nations and the tenets of international law consider the annexation or acquisition of territories of others by force a criminal act endangering international peace and security. The United Nations International Law Commission has confirmed this definition. Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations, in total complementarity with the tenets of international law, exhorted its Members to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations".

The Security Council, the General Assembly and all other organs of the United Nations have adopted hundreds of resolutions calling on Israel to end its occupation of Arab territories. Regrettably, more than 40 years after Israel's occupation of Arab territories, including Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, the clear picture on the horizon still speaks of Israel's rejection of peace and its persistence in escalating acts of aggression, its continued war crimes, its settlement activities, its killing, terror, destruction, siege, detention, imprisonment and continued building of the separation wall.

These activities have been carried out in full view of those who sing the praises of democracy and who claim to be champions of human rights in other parts of the world where the amount of human rights violations is almost negligible in comparison to those committed by Israel in the occupied Arab territories. This Israeli policy, which is readily condoned by some and deliberately protected by powerful States in the Security Council, basically aims at keeping the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace ever at a distance.

In their recent summit in Riyadh, Arab leaders relaunched the Arab Peace Initiative that was adopted by the 2002 Beirut Summit. The Initiative confirmed the Arab commitment to a just and comprehensive peace as a strategic choice. It also confirmed that this process is indivisible. Arab commitment to the realization of a just and comprehensive peace must be matched by a concomitant and serious commitment by the Israeli Government and those who support it to the achievement of that peace, including by compliance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and withdrawal from occupied territories as mandated by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Peace is a major political responsibility, the weight of which can be felt only by those who truly believe in it. We cannot talk about peace — this noble word — in the context of a manoeuvring Israeli logic of division, with its intention of circumventing the necessary measures leading to such peace and Israel's attempts to dwarf the noble objectives of a just and comprehensive peace process on which the international community pins its hopes.

Syria followed the events in the Gaza Strip between our Palestinian brothers with great sorrow. Syria insists on the need for Palestinians to overcome the adverse repercussions of these serious developments by addressing their differences through direct dialogue among parties concerned with a view to restoring Palestinian national unity in order to best serve the goals and noble cause of their people. Syria would stress that it would make every effort possible to push toward the realization of this objective.

The Israeli military manoeuvres that are continuing in the occupied Syrian Golan for the second time in a couple of months — described by the Israeli officials themselves as the largest in scale in years — starkly testify to the Israeli indifference to and disregard for the possible consequences of preparing to wage new wars and of provocations and continued occupation. The disquieting irony is that these Israeli

measures coincide with Israel's attempt to market the claims of its commitment to peace while its military machine continues to mobilize in an unprecedented manner that runs totally counter to the will not to escalate tensions and the will to work for peace.

The command of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in Golan (UNDOF) confirmed on 11 July 2007 that the tension along the Syrian-Israeli border has reached its highest level in years. The UNDOF command also confirmed that Israel bears the full responsibility for this tension. These unquestionably suspicious Israeli military moves in the occupied Syrian Golan are cause for serious concern, particularly when they are accompanied by public threats by Israel politicians and leaders in the Israeli army regarding the possibility of an outbreak of war with the Syrian Arab Republic. This is associated with Israel's continued attempts to consolidate and expedite the settler activities in the occupied Syrian Golan, the last instance of which was an attempt by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism to grant new Syrian land — an area of 80 dunums in the region of el-Bouteiha, which is the southernmost point of occupied Syrian Golan, at the intersection of the Jordanian, Syrian and Palestinian borders — to build a tourist village.

Confirming Israel's intention to act against peace and against returning land to its rightful owners, Mr. Netanyahu, the Chairman of the Likud Party, made a statement on 2 August 2007 to settlers in the Katzrin settlement, which was built on the ruins of Qasrin, a Syrian village, stating "Golan Heights is part and parcel of the State of Israel and it is the most beautiful piece of land in northern Israel". In addition, statements have been made by Mr. Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister, in which he claimed that the Golan is part and parcel of Israel and that it would remain in the hands of Israelis as long as he remained the Prime Minister of Israel.

Israel has proved yet again through such irresponsible declarations that it is not really interested in the peace process and that it continues to pursue a policy of fait accompli by force and in a manner that runs counter to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations. Israel is also, through statements like these, riding roughshod over repeated Arab and Syrian calls for the realization of peace. This proves beyond any doubt that Israel does not really have the real political will to achieve peace.

On a larger scale, this means that the international community must adopt measures that force Israel to comply with international resolutions and to sit in good faith at the negotiations table.

The Syrian people will not surrender and will not submit to occupation, and wants negotiations that will restore all of its occupied territories to the boundaries of 4 June 1967.

My country follows closely the developments regarding the call for an international peace conference next fall. It believes that any such initiative should be clearly defined, with clear terms of reference and objectives. Such a process must also provide the necessary guarantees for the implementation of internationally legitimate resolutions and should be a comprehensive and a sincere peace initiative that will bring about the recovery of all usurped Arab lands. The policy of wasting time and ignoring the legitimate rights of people is only a prescription for further failures in addressing the questions of our region, and it only attempts to protect Israeli settlement and expansion projects.

The Syrian Arab Republic has chosen comprehensive and just peace as a strategic option on the basis of the well-known terms of reference of peace, which definitely include the return of all occupied Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan, to the lines of 4 June 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital. The continued occupation runs counter to peace and means more conflict, more victims and more destruction.

As the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, President Assad, stated recently:

> "Israelis must learn that genuine peace that continues is more meaningful than any other option because other options are not permanent. The cost of peace is hundreds of times less than the cost of occupation and aggression, which cannot continue forever."

That is the end of my statement. Allow me to comment briefly on the statement we have just heard by the Israeli representative.

The policy of State-sponsored terror pursued by Israel is internationally documented. It is documented by hundreds of relevant international institutions and includes the slaughters, crimes, detentions,

imprisonments, the building of settlements, the building of the racist wall of separation in the occupied territories and the changing of demographics and of the landmarks of Syrian and Palestinian territories.

The Israeli representative cannot hide the truth, which is known to everyone. He cannot hide or cover these facts through his unfounded claims. The truth to which we refer is represented in the facts already cited by Mr. Williams in his opening statement. The facts are also corroborated by the commanders of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and UNDOF, in addition to the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice and scores of resolutions adopted by various United Nations organizations, agencies, bodies and entities such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The Israeli State acts of terror have already harmed UNIFIL personnel and international representatives. It has stood in the way of implementing many of the resolutions of the Security Council. It also stood against attempts by the Secretary-General to send fact-finding missions to verify and testify to the Israeli crimes committed in Jenin, Nablus and Qana. The Israeli policy of State-sponsored terrorism has a long history. Israel refused to receive the international committee that was sent to investigate Israeli practices against civilians in the occupied Arab territories.

Peace is action, not words, and the actions of the Israeli Government are very far removed from its words and the repeated hackneyed words spoken by its Permanent Representative to which we must listen in this Council.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, Mr. President, on behalf of the Arab Group, to express my congratulations on the way in which you have guided the work of the Council for the month of August. Our Group is fully confident in the work of the Council under your wise and skilful guidance. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Permanent Representative of China for assuming the presidency in July with skill and efficiency. We also express our appreciation to Mr. Michael Williams, Special Coordinator for the Peace Process in the Middle East, for his briefing on the current situation in our region. I thank him on behalf of the Arab Group for the constructive role he has played and to wish him every success in his future endeavours in London. I hope that he will remain in touch with us and remain involved with the Palestinian question.

The Security Council has before it today the issue of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. This is one of the most important items on the Council's agenda, as it has been for more that five decades. As the Council is aware, this issue, with all its ramifications, is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The events of recent years have confirmed the rightness of the international community's conviction that solving this question is indeed at the heart of a comprehensive and just solution to the conflict.

Since the Council debated the situation in the Middle East last month, the occupied territories have been a theatre for the pernicious escalation of acts of violence by the Israeli occupation authorities.

At a time when the Islamic world is commemorating the setting ablaze of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Israel is continuing its irresponsible actions. Chief among those are its demolition and excavation work within the area surrounding the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque itself, in flagrant violation of its sanctity, threatening its structural integrity, and attempting to obliterate the character and religious symbols of the Mosque. We resolutely condemn such hostile Israeli actions, which undermine the third most Holy Place, and the first Qiblah of the Islamic faith.

We therefore call upon the Security Council, the body primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, to assume its responsibilities and intervene immediately to compel Israel to respect resolutions of international legality and halt its actions. Those actions are threatening the religious and cultural identity of Jerusalem. Moreover, they constitute an act of provocation, an affront to the feelings of Muslims and a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

Those irresponsible practices are also flagrant violations of 16 relevant Council resolutions, especially resolution 465 (1980), which emphasized that all measures, and legislative and administrative actions, taken by the Israeli occupying Power to change the legal character, demographic composition,

institutional structure or status of occupied Jerusalem had no legal validity. That is in addition to the fact that Israel's actions are in flagrant violation of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including Jerusalem. Those measures are also in violation of the Hague Convention of 1954, which stipulates that no measures or acts of hostility should be undertaken against religious sites, which are the special heritage of peoples.

In addition to continuing its acts of demolition and excavation around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Israel is also continuing its military incursions and repeated acts of aggression in territory under the control of the Palestinian Authority, namely, Gaza and the West Bank. It is also continuing its economic blockade and the illegal construction of its racist expansionist wall. It is establishing a cordon of roads intended to strangle Palestinian villages and towns, rendering all movement and communication between them extremely difficult. Israel is continuing to build and expand settlements.

All of those are illegal actions that flagrantly violate international law, United Nations resolutions and the Quartet Road Map, which the Council adopted in resolution 1515 (2003). They not only have serious consequences for the security and stability of the region and the world, but they also undermine international efforts to relaunch the Quartet peace process, as well as any just and lasting comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict, at the very heart of which is the Palestinian question.

Such a solution will not be attainable so long as Israel continues its unilateral measures to establish a fait accompli and influence the results of final status negotiations. A lasting solution will be possible only if we put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories in accordance with internationally binding resolutions, as well as with the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference, the principle of land for peace, the requirements of the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, ensuring that the Palestinian people can fully regain their legitimate political rights. At last they could thus achieve the establishment of an independent State of their own on their territory, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The Arab Group asserts its full solidarity with Syria and demands that Israel fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Arab Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders.

We are also in full solidarity with Lebanon, its Government and its people in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), especially as regards the return of Lebanese territory still under Israeli occupation — including the northern area of the Ghajar region, the Shab'aa Farms and the Kafr Shuba hills. We also support the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority over all of its territories.

The Arab Group urges the Council to shoulder its responsibilities, compel Israel to cease its daily violations of Lebanese air, ground and maritime borders and to provide Lebanon with a map of the landmines it has laid in the country. Israel must also provide full information about the cluster and fragmentation bombs dropped on Lebanese territory, which pose a threat to the safety and security and livelihood of civilians.

The Arab Group believes that it is also time to release Lebanese prisoners who have languished in Israeli jails for many years, in violation of humanitarian and legal principles.

In conclusion, we reserve the right to once again raise before the Council the issue of the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Arab territories. We hope that the Council will compel Israel to abide by the resolutions pertaining to this conflict. The Council should also assume its responsibilities and compel Israel to become seriously involved in the peace process and to respond to Arab initiatives, in particular the Peace Initiative endorsed by the Beirut Summit in 2002 and reaffirmed at the recent Riyadh Summit.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Salgueiro (Portugal): I should like to begin by making a special reference to Mr. Michael Williams, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and to let him know how much we have appreciated his solid, thorough and dedicated work. We wish him well in his new job.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Montenegro and Serbia and the European Free Trade

Association country Liechtenstein, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this declaration.

The European Union believes it is a matter of the utmost urgency to carry forward a credible peace process that will give the Palestinian people an independent, democratic and viable State, living side by side with Israel and its other neighbours in peace and security. Europe's resolve to contribute to the resolution of this conflict as part of bringing peace and stability to the Middle East remains unchanged.

At this moment of increased diplomatic initiatives and dialogue, we sense a window of opportunity that should not be missed. The European Union strongly encourages the parties to continue their bilateral dialogue, which should both accomplish concrete results and lead to meaningful political negotiations to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the conflict. In addition to the engagement of the parties, the continued support of the international community is crucial to advance the peace process.

The European Union is firmly committed to playing an active role, particularly within the framework of the Quartet, to put in place a political and diplomatic process offering the prospect of a comprehensive settlement, in conformity with the relevant Security Council resolutions and on the basis of the Road Map, notably its goals and principles. That commitment was renewed last July when the Quartet principals met in Lisbon, with the participation of Tony Blair as Quartet Representative for the first time. In that context, the European Union welcomed President Bush's speech of 16 July. We expect that the Quartet will participate and play an active role in the preparation of the international meeting proposed for November.

The European Union also stresses the importance of renewing the Quartet's dialogue with the parties and representatives of the Arab League. We believe that the Arab Peace Initiative is a major element intended to advance regional peace. We look forward to a fruitful next meeting of the Quartet, in the margins of the General Assembly, to hear the first proposals of the Quartet Representative and further discuss the way forward.

The perspectives opened up in the political and diplomatic spheres need to be matched by substantive progress on the ground, where the situation remains of particular concern.

The European Union is deeply concerned by the serious events in Gaza. We reaffirm our full support for President Abbas and the Government under Prime Minister Fayyad. Reconciliation and national unity in support of the programme of peace articulated by President Abbas are the only way to achieve Palestinian national goals by peaceful, lawful and democratic means. The European Union opposes any division of the Palestinian territories and confirms its readiness to engage with all Palestinian parties whose policies and actions reflect the Quartet principles.

We are following with particular apprehension the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. We continue to provide emergency and humanitarian assistance to its population. In this context, we urge all parties to work towards the opening of the crossings in and out of Gaza for humanitarian and commercial flows, in accordance with the Agreement on Movement and Access.

Stopping all acts of violence and terror among the parties is of the utmost importance if the peace process is to succeed. We reiterate our call for the release of the abducted Israeli soldier as well as of the Palestinian legislators detained in Israel. Following recent meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, the European Union welcomes, as a first step, the partial transfer by Israel of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues, and we reiterate our call for the immediate and regular release of the remaining and future funds. We also commend the initial release of prisoners, and we urge further steps to honour the commitments made at those meetings, including the removal of barriers and checkpoints in the West Bank. Such moves will support progress on the political track and help to create the necessary framework and confidence to advance the peace process.

Settlement activities in and around East Jerusalem and in the rest of the West Bank and the ongoing construction of the barrier on Palestinian land, which are against international law, are of particular concern. As we have stated many times, we will not recognize changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by the parties. The European Union has resumed its direct financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority. We are committed to helping to build the institutions and the economy of the future

Palestinian State, which we believe will play a fundamental role in expediting the peace process. That is also the core of the mandate of Tony Blair, whose appointment as Quartet Representative the European Union warmly welcomed.

The European Union strongly supports the reinforcement of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence and its legitimate and democratic Government. We renew the call for the full and speedy implementation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004) and of all other relevant resolutions, and we call on Syria and other countries in the region to refrain from destabilizing the country.

The European Union welcomes the decision by the Security Council on the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and renews its commitment to continue to play an active role in the Force. We strongly condemn all acts of violence against UNIFIL, in particular the one in June, which claimed the lives of six peacekeepers of the Spanish contingent.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in Lebanon, in particular at Nahr el-Bared, and reiterates its condemnation of the attacks on Lebanese people and the Lebanese Armed Forces. The European Union urges all political forces to search for a solution to the political deadlock through dialogue and with full respect for the country's democratic institutions. In that context, we also welcome all the constructive initiatives and mediation efforts that have been carried out by the international community.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Therefore, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3.30 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.40 p.m.